



Submitted photo

■ Texarkana Convention Center and Holiday Inn Hotel will be similar to the hotel in this photo. Texarkana, Ark., broke ground on the complex Thursday.

New convention center

Officials break ground on 22,000-square-foot facility

By KRISTEN ARVON
Texarkana Gazette

It was hard to tell if the tent full of people attending the groundbreaking for the Texarkana Convention Center in the Crossroads Business Park were shivering because of excitement or the cold wind blowing.

The ceremony marked the start of Phase 1 of the 22,000-square-foot Texarkana Convention Center and Holiday Inn Hotel located in the park.

Phase 2 will involve plans for the Holiday Springs Water Park, which will be behind the convention center. The park will be 10 to 15 acres.

"When I first became mayor, I was asked about the convention center. Some said it would never come. I was positive from Day 1, and it's certainly positive for those taxpayers that said this wouldn't come," Mayor Wayne Smith said. "It's coming and it starts today."

The convention center and hotel are a reality because of "People's State Bank, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Small Business Administration, who are providing financing, but most importantly because of Dr. Hiren Patel."

Continued from Page 1A

"It's a very high-tech design, it's the next generation for the Holiday Inn design," Patel said.

The hotel will host 127 rooms and suites and a full-service restaurant.

The convention center will hold 1,000 people and have several smaller meeting rooms. Meetings can be held inside the center or outdoors. The main room can also be set up for smaller meeting spaces.

Construction will cost \$28 million, Patel said.

Dirt work should begin no later than Nov. 15, with an expected completion date within nine months.

The groundbreaking was conducted in a large tent to shield participants from the cold, drizzly weather.

"I assure you when we need meet again, it will be under a much bigger tent," Patel said, which drew applause.

Plans for the business park began a few years ago with trying to decide where to put the Texarkana Bandits, the city's former hockey team.

"It all began with a casual conversation with Fay J. Durrant and myself," said Horace Shipp, former Texarkana, Ark., mayor. Durrant owned the Bandits.

"Fast forward to now, a small seed and vision can make things happen. It can't happen with just one person. It takes a lot of people," Shipp said.

"I have to pinch myself to make sure this is a reality. The main ingredient behind this is the Patels. They're going to build something that will make



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■ Holiday Inn's social hub concept takes the bar inside the hotel and makes it the center of services, which feature a restaurant, game room and business center.

Patel and father Dinesh are the investors behind the project.

"I'm excited. The long wait is over," Patel said. "It was my family's hope this investment will bring more jobs and economic growth to Texarkana, Ark., for years to come."

The complex has been a long time coming, Patel said. The delay was because of the hotel brand's design.

"This is the Holiday Inn's 2012 design. It's a social hub," he said.

The social hub concept takes

the bar inside the hotel and makes it the center of services, which include a restaurant, game room and business center.

"The HUB restaurant will feature televisions at the table, as well as gaming devices for all

See CENTER on Page 2A



Staff photo by Kristin Lovell

■ Surrounded by his parents, Bharat and Dinesh Patel, left, and wife Nita, Dr. Hiren Patel, investor in the Texarkana Convention Center and Holiday Inn Hotel, speaks to the media Thursday afternoon. The convention center/hotel complex will be built within the Crossroads Business Park in Texarkana, Ark. The \$28 million construction project is scheduled to begin before Nov. 15 and complete within nine months.

everything already here (in the park) even better. You are my heroes."

City Manager Harold Becht also spoke at the ceremony. He likened the project to the science of aerodynamics. He said in aerodynamics, the leading part of the wing gives most of an airplane's lift.

"Of all of the square feet of space of an airplane, only the very small area up and down the wing provides the margin to lift the aircraft. ... Early on, my staff and I developed some economic goals for Texarkana, Ark. As a result, our vision provided us the lift and direc-

tion for future development," Becht said.

"When it might appear we were facing failure, the opportunity to begin again more intelligently lifted us to success. On behalf of the mayor and the Board of Directors, I'm before you the Holiday Inn Hotel and Texarkana Convention Center at Crossroads in Texarkana, Ark. We applaud everyone who helped bring and make this vision a reality."

Regarding the water park, Patel said a study showed the park to be a good fit for the city and area.

Though other details about

the park are preliminary, Patel said designs are being drawn up.

"It will be a small water park but will handle Texarkana, U.S.A., and the neighboring cities' needs," he said.

After city and community leaders spoke to the crowd, there was only one thing left to do.

"Ladies and gentlemen, let's turn some dirt," said Smith as he handed shovels and hard hats adorned with the Holiday Inn Hotel photo to city leaders and the Patel family.

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